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CHAPTER XI

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

BIRTH

171 846 Birth was preceded and followed by restrictions on the activities of the parents that applied to both to about the same degree. This semi-couvade, as Kroeber styles it, was moderate and of the order that prevailed generally throughout the Southwest and California.

849 When in the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy, the expectant mother should not lie flat on her back else the embryo would lie crosswise or be born feet first. Neither she nor her husband should look at dead animals or birds, else the child would sicken like the animal, would be paralyzed for weeks. On the whole, it were better that the father did not hunt; if he did, he must not stare at what he killed. Nowadays, neither may look at a picture of any sort; the child will be deformed. Nor could either look at or touch rattlesnakes, else the child would be deformed and never walk: it would seem to lack bones; could not stand.

Food tabus applied to the mother from the sixth month. She must eat no more than she could help and must especially avoid fat. Should she eat fat, the embryo would be covered with it, especially its eyes, nose and mouth (a caul?). The mouth would be filled with fat, so that at its first breath, the child would choke. There was no objection to her eating salt, the common tabu elsewhere. Her husband could eat fat and salt at this time, but he joined her after the birth in eschewing them.

It was known that pregnancy has a duration of nine lunar months. It was, however, not usual to calculate the exact time at which the birth would occur, but some women knew they would give birth at a particular full moon, e.g. Births were rather uniformly distributed through the year.

844 343 Birth took place in the menstrual shelter, or a similar structure

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was bilt for the purpose near the house by the husband or other relatives. This consisted of a ridgepole supported on two posts, placed east and west, with willow branches thrust into the groun and bent over to it. The whole was covered with arrowweedsand dirt. It was circular in ground-plan. The lodge had no spcial name, but like the storehouse was called vana'a⁴. A fire ws built within to warm the ground and to heat water.

Thexpectant mother was helped by her mother and another feminie relative. They would choose a helper whose time of delivery ad been brief. If the parturient could not endure the pain, four ofive women were called in to assist until the little house was fil. They did not sing. Should the case be exceptionally difficu, they thought her bewitched and called in a shaman who could ure this. Then her husband or other male relative would help. here were no internal medicines to accelerate delivery nor for an xcessive flow following birth. Some women preferred to give bth unassisted.

A woan of middle age told me that she had borne her five children alone. Her husand, a widower with children of his own, protested that he did not know how to lp, but she prevailed on him to heat water, etc., as needed. This was purely matter of personal preference: she did not like to have the old women fussing er her. She was also aware of the desirability of continuing her domestic labountil the last moment.

It ws recognized that births after the first were of shorter duratin. In the old days, it was said, a good many women died in chiloirth, whereas nowadays not many are lost; which argues for thabsence of venereal disease today.

Thearturient sat with her back against the western post, because i the tale of the woman who had twins (p. 368), she tried the fou directions when her pains began. She said, "A woman who iso give birth should sit against the western post, facing east." . hole made in front of the parturient was filled with sand, which as hollowed a little and covered with a cotton cloth, rabbitsin blanket or other soft thing to receive the baby. She sat wit her knees drawn up. A strong woman, standing behind, would ut her arms around her, pressing downward and shifting her fro side to side. From the time the birth pains began, the parturint was not allowed to drink.

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844 The navel cord was cut after the afterbirth was ejected. Anyone cut it and the stub of the navel was never tied. A delayed afterbirth was considered dangerous not only for the mother but the child. The afterbirth was buried a short distance from the house in a hole waist-deep, filled with stones and rammed earth. [732] Should a dog eat it, the child would become insane.

The newborn child was washed with warm water and tied in the cradle which was prepared before it was born. At this time, a woman who had no relatives to help her look after a crying child, would put her finger in her mouth and press it against the baby's palate, so that it would never cry later. They did not massage or mould the child's features or limbs as elsewhere. [856] Slight occipital flattening, due to lying on the hard cradle, was common and was desired. Warm ashes were put on a cloth placed on the navel and soaked with warm water. They might also place on the navel a salve made of a few crushed castor [439] beans (obtained by trade from northern Mexico) mixed with water. The cord dropped off in two days if well tended, but always within four days. No further attention was given the sloughed-off cord.

Immediately after the delivery of the afterbirth, the mother lay in a pit, extending from armpit to knees, within the house. This was previously lined with warmed flat stones and ashes, with which she was also covered. These were renewed as they cooled.

846 It was held that the mother should not resume her occupations for eight days. During this period she was washed every morning and given only corn soup without salt. Her husband also washed on these eight days, but refrained from fats, sweets and salt for the first four only. On the first four days the faces of child and [302] mother were anointed with a preparation made by boiling mesquite beans, straining and boiling down the juice to a syrup, which was then mixed with red paint. This was said to take the grease off their faces.

853 The child was not put to breast for four days. In the meantime it was given drops of warm water. The baby could endure without food, it was held, because the mother had practically starved herself for several months before the birth.

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The sex of the child could be predicted: for a boy the pains followed rapidly and were sharper than for a girl. They say that when a woman had borne only sons or daughters and at last one of the opposite sex was born, it would be her last child. An extension of the idea was cited: when the youngest child of I—— walked at an early age, although her elder children had been slow in learning to walk, they said it would be her last child.

Whether one would have a child at all was forecast by a dream. A man or woman might dream of gathering little birds or puppies, of being fond of them. This was an omen that they would have children. Other dreams were interpreted as signs that they would have no children.

Twins and deformed infants, unlike ordinary children, were thought to be reborn. They were in this world merely as visitors, hence if they were mistreated they would return to their home. Their village was believed to lie to the northwest beyond the Hassayampa Mountains. Some of its inhabitants were without arms or mouths or noses; some had a single eye in the middle of their foreheads; others were twins. These people would say, "We want to go on a long journey," and would wander into this world to be born. When their fellows missed them, they would say, "They have gone somewhere to rest under a shade." Their advent was infrequent because people do not leave their homes casually. When twins and deformed persons died, they returned to this village, not to the land of the dead, until they were reborn. It was considered lucky for a mother to have twins.

No physiological reason was assigned for twinning. On the other hand, an albino (hiθa'hwa't, "red eyes") was thought the result of the pregnant mother having eaten something gnawed by a gopher, such as mesquite beans. Albinos were reported to have a reddish iris and be unable to see well in the sunlight, but to have normally pigmented skin and hair.

Twins were both reared, although this was difficult. They were more likely to die than other children. When one sickened or died, the other would also. It was thought that when one died, it had not been well treated, had not been taken up when it cried. The sympathetic bond may well have been thought to